

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Thursday 25th July 2024 at 7:00pm in the Main Hall of the Merryoaks Community Hall, Park House Rd, Durham DH1 3QF.

Present: Councillors S Walker (in the **Chair**), E Ashby, J Ashby, V Ashfield, N Brown, A Doig, D Freeman, G Holland, C Lattin, R Ormerod and E Scott.

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley and 2 members of the public.

1. TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE (OR NOT) APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE FROM TODAY'S MEETING

Apologies were received and accepted from Councillors L Brown, R Hanson, H Weston and R Friederichsen.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

Councillor E Scott declared an interest in the item relating to Visit County Durham and took no part in the discussion or vote on this item.

Councillor S Walker declared an interest in the report from Merryoaks Community Hall on their recent grant award under item 7 and took no part in the discussion on this item.

3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 27TH JUNE 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 27th June 2024 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None received.

5. COMMITTEE UPDATES

• Planning and Licensing Committee

Councillor G Holland presented the minutes from the Planning and Licensing Committee meetings held on 14th and 28th June 2024. There being no queries from Members, Councillor G Holland moved on to Committee reports.

Proposed joint project with Durham County Council on producing an evidence-base for non-designated heritage assets (NDHAs) within the Durham City Conservation Area.

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council is working together with Durham County Council on the production of a Conservation Area Management

Plan. As part of this, the Parish Council is part-funding the officer time required to produce this Plan.

As part of this work, the Clerk advised that Lee Hall needs to produce an evidence base for the existing list of non-designated heritage assets within the Durham City Conservation Area. The Clerk advised that most of these assets have been identified over time either through the day-to-day planning process, the creation of the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan or the production of the Conservation Area Character Appraisal in 2016.

The Clerk highlighted that there are currently 314 such assets on the existing list and each one of these needs to be assessed via a survey, with the asset being scored based on a set of criteria. There is also a need to provide an up-to-date photo of the asset itself.

The Clerk advised that a copy of all of these assets has been provided along with this Agenda for Members' consideration. These do not include NDHAs identified outside of the Conservation Area (such as the Hill colleges) nor those assets identified through the local list project, from which surveys already exist from those who nominated each asset.

The Clerk advised that, due to current resourcing issues, it is not possible for Lee and DCC's Conservation team to carry out this work alone and they have therefore reached out to the Parish Council as well as colleagues within the City of Durham Trust to ask for our support in producing this evidence base.

The deadline for completing this survey work is the end of August/ beginning of September 2024.

Councillor G Holland advised that there is clearly a need for additional volunteers to be identified to support this project and it is hoped that circa. 30 volunteers in total would make this task more achievable.

Councillor A Doig and the Chair particularly expressed a concern about the likely administrative workload implications for the Clerk on this project.

The Clerk highlighted that Sue Childs had been actively engaged in this project from the beginning and has indicated her willingness to support the Clerk in the administrative side of this work.

Councillor J Ashby highlighted the significant work this project would involve and advised that he would support contracting Sue's services on this project, particularly highlighting the excellent work Sue did on the Neighbourhood Plan.

Members unanimously **agreed** to work positively with Durham County Council and colleagues on the production of this evidence base and to take all actions necessary to support the production of these surveys within the timeframe identified above.

As part of this, it was also proposed and unanimously **agreed** to set aside a budget for paying Sue should she wish to be paid for her support, in order to reduce the work implications on the Clerk.

Response to Durham County Council's Regulation 7 Direction renewal application for the Durham City Conservation Area.

Members noted the recent application for the renewal of DCC's Regulation 7 Direction and the ongoing consultation relating to this. Members expressed their full support for this Direction and unanimously **agreed** the following response to this consultation:

Response to Regulation 7 Direction consultation

The City of Durham Parish Council writes to express its full support for the Local Authority's renewal application for the Direction made under Regulation 7. This Direction covers part of the Durham City Conservation Area and removes deemed consent rights for the display of estate agents' boards falling within Class 3A of Schedule 3, Part 1 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007.

Background to the current Direction

The current Direction runs for a period of 5 years and we understand expires in October 2024. Although the original consultation on the current Direction pre-dated the formation of the City of Durham Parish Council, we are aware of the very substantial work by the Local Authority, the Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum and many others prior to the introduction of this Direction to address this issue and the Parish Council fully supports this Direction in its entirety.

In particular, prior to its report setting out the case for this Direction to Durham County Council's Cabinet in February 2018¹, the Local Authority had sought to tackle this issue with a Voluntary Lettings Board Code (2011-2018). Whilst the introduction of the Voluntary Code affected a limited improvement to the situation, it was not considered successful in addressing the issue.

Between 9th January 2017 and 17th February 2017, the Local Authority undertook an extensive public consultation on options to address this issue. A total of 104 responses were received at that time, of whom 90% considered To Let Boards to be a significant problem within the City with only 2% considering there to be no issue at all. 87% of those who responded also considered option 3 (introduction of the Regulation & Direction) to be the preferred solution with only 3% considering that the continuation of the current Voluntary Code as being an effective solution.

Prior to the introduction of the Direction, there had been an excessive proliferation of estate agents' boards in areas of the City where former family homes have been

¹ <https://www.durham.gov.uk/media/25290/Proposals-to-restrict-Letting-Boards-in-areas-of-high-number-student-properties-Report-to-Cabinet-7-February-2018/pdf/LettingBoardsReportCabinet7Feb2018.pdf?m=1531308504553>

*transformed into Houses in Multiple Occupation (see **Appendix 1**), resulting in a transient population with frequent letting and sale of units.*

Whilst To Let boards act as a direction to students of property available to let for future terms, they also promote high proportions of multi occupied properties available in the central area of the City which is considered by residents to be detrimental to the enjoyment of permanent residents and also to tourists visiting the beautiful asset of the famous Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site and its surrounding complementary features.

The area covered by this Direction forms part of Durham City Centre Conservation Area within which there are also a number of listed buildings. As such, the Local Authority is under a statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of the preservation and enhancement of the character or appearance of these assets. The untidy and cluttered street scene resulting from the proliferation of estate agents' boards certainly detracted from the character and appearance of the area at certain times of the year prior to 2019.

Whilst a range of options to address this issue were considered by the Local Authority in 2018, the existing Direction has been successful in keeping streets in our City clear of these estate agents' boards. Residents indicate to us that there has been a marked improvement in the visual appearance of these areas and indeed there is now an almost total absence of estate agents' To Let Boards year-round within the City.

Taking the above into account, there is clear evidence of the Direction working. This is acknowledged in many of the representations we receive from those locally who strongly support the renewal of the Direction. Substantial satisfaction is expressed by residents in the notable improvement to the character and appearance of the City since the Direction has been in force.

Policy context

Paragraph 141 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that the quality and character of places can suffer when advertisements are poorly sited and designed, and explains that the consent process for advertisements should be operated in a way that is simple, efficient and effective.

Paragraph 042 of the Government's Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) explains what is required for a Direction under Regulation 7 to be made. It states that 'it must be clear that one or more of the deemed consent provisions has had such adverse effects on the amenity or public safety of the area that there is no prospect of an improvement in the quality of the advertising in a locality, unless the local planning authority are given the power to control that particular type of advertisement.'

Policy 29 of the County Durham Plan (CDP) is considered relevant and relates to Sustainable Design stating that proposals should ensure that adverts and signage

are not detrimental to visual amenity or highway safety and sited in inappropriate locations.

The application to renew this Regulation 7 Direction is considered to comply with the NPPF. Moreover, the continued requirement that all To Let boards within the designated area need express consent from the Local Authority is considered reasonable. The removal of high concentrations of To Let Boards which have evidently been detrimental to visual amenity within the City also accords with the aims of adopted local development plan policy.

'Deemed consent' rights

The deemed consent rights it is sought to remove do have some restrictions. Only one board is permitted to be displayed per property and they are not permitted to be displayed for more than 14 days following the sale or lease of the property. However, even with these limitations the Parish Council considers that, in areas of high concentrations of HMOs, even the lawful display of boards will undoubtedly result in a cluttered and unsightly street scene.

Powers do exist for Local Authorities to secure prosecutions in such cases. However, not only is this time consuming but it can be difficult to secure prosecutions in those cases where it is not always known when a lease for each individual bedspace within a property has been concluded. This being so, it seems that only the renewal of the Direction will protect the character and appearance of the areas in question from the harmful effects and a proliferation of estate agents' boards.

Conclusion

The areas covered by the Direction are ones where the preservation or enhancement of their character or appearance should be given substantial weight. Harm to their character and appearance has arisen in the past, but has been prevented by this Direction since its introduction in 2019. To prevent a recurrence of harm, we fully support the renewal of this Direction without delay.

End of response

• Environment Committee

Councillor C Lattin presented the minutes from the Environment Committee meeting held on 11th June 2024. There were no queries from Members on these minutes.

• Business Committee

Councillor R Ormerod presented the minutes from the Business Committee meeting held on 21st May 2024. There being no queries from Members, Councillor R Ormerod moved on to Committee reports.

Proposal by Visit County Durham on joint project for Travel Trade promotion

Following the review of the Parish Council's budget aimed at providing professional support for local businesses, the Clerk highlighted that the Parish Council's Business Committee has been working to establish a different approach to the way the Parish Council markets the City centre, with a preference to move away from traditional social media marketing and more focus on driving visitor numbers directly.

The Clerk advised that Visit County Durham is the official tourism management organisation for the region and the Parish Council's Business Committee is proposing a partnership with VCD as this presents an opportunity to amplify our marketing efforts effectively.

The Clerk advised that the Parish Council has recently supported VCD and Durham County Council in its efforts to achieving 'coach friendly status' for Durham City and the result of this application is expected imminently.

Councillor R Ormerod advised that the Business Committee wishes to take this further and work collaboratively with VCD on driving additional footfall to the City directly through a travel trade promotion and recently met with Sarah Johnson the Marketing and Communications Manager at Visit County Durham to review these opportunities.

The Clerk highlighted that Visit County Durham is able to offer the following package for advertising Durham City through its travel trade promotion:

- Discover Durham annual membership, invitation to meetings, social media support
- Dedicated page on the Discover Durham website, featuring content on retail, food and drink and events
- Key City events featured in the What's On section
- Dedicated Durham City solus e-newsletter to groups and travel trade database
- Dedicated Christmas Festival solus e-newsletter to groups and travel trade database
- Dedicated Christmas Festival or general banner advert on DiscoverDurham.co.uk x 2 months
- Dedicated Christmas Festival or general e-newsletter banner advert x 2 months
- Joint funding of an advertorial in one of the travel trade publications
- Joint funding of a media visit (potentially linked to the Fringe)

The total cost for this package is £3,000 and this is well within the defined budget for this priority.

The Clerk advised that the Business Committee has also clarified that the promotion does not necessarily need to focus on Christmas events solely and this can be tailored according to our preferences, with the caveat that there is approximately 9-12 months of lead-in time required in advance of any events we'd like to see visitors coming to the City for.

At its most recent meeting, the Business Committee agreed to recommend to Full Council acceptance of this funding.

Members expressed a desire not to focus solely on Christmas events but rather to focus on events during the Spring/Summer which were footfall dependent, e.g. the Fringe Festival.

Councillor A Doig advised that he could not support this as he felt that VCD has more resources to deliver this type of activity already rather than asking the Parish Council for funding.

Members **agreed** (9 votes in favour, 1 against) to provide £3,000 towards the City specific travel trade promotion being delivered by Visit County Durham, as set out in the report provided.

Proposal from Durham BID on proposed improvements to Silver Street/ Fowler's Yard

Through its association with Durham BID, the Clerk advised that the Parish Council's Business Committee is aware of a recent meeting with Silver Street businesses with the Durham BID board regarding their concerns relating to the poor street scene and visual appearance of Silver Street.

In a joint meeting with the BID, businesses asked that the BID and other partners work to improve the street scene and also support initiatives such as events to drive additional footfall.

In addition, the Clerk advised that businesses raised concerns about anti-social behaviour, nuisance begging and non-paying customers asking to use the premises toilets and the business not being aware of where to signpost these individuals to the nearest public toilets. On these latter issues, the Clerk highlighted that the Parish Council is funding additional Neighbourhood Wardens and Police for the City centre, the Council has also produced an evidence base in favour of the proposed Public Space Protection Order against anti-social behaviour and begging in the City centre and is presently producing a City Safety and Wellbeing card which includes details of all public toilets in the City.

The Clerk advised that Durham BID has reached out to the Parish Council for financial support on an initiative to fund improvements to premises frontages and the entrance to Fowler's Yard from Silver Street (alley running next to the Fancy Dress store on Silver Street).

Members are aware of the substantial ongoing work to improve the waste situation and general appearance of Fowler's Yard by the Parish Council and it is positive news to be aware that there are additional efforts by Durham BID to improve one of the access routes into the Fowler's Yard area.

Durham BID is also looking at introducing bunting to Silver Street as well as providing silk floral displays to shop frontages.

The Clerk advised that the premises the BID is looking to introduce this type of display to include: Uno Momento, Tortilla, Holland and Barrett, Kokoro, Cafe Nero, Vodaphone, Making Faces, Faru, Fusha, Nanakeet, Grape Tree Feed Good Food, Coviello, Moon, T4, Treats, Everyday Food and Durham Gin.

The total cost for providing this type of display is £10,600 (+ VAT) and Durham BID has asked if the Parish Council would be willing to make a financial contribution to this project for a display over the summer holidays.

The BID has assured the Council that the installation of these displays does not involve drilling or any permanent building damage.

The Clerk highlighted that there is £4,000 remaining in the Parish Council's budget on improving Fowler's Yard (previously agreed as part of a £10,000 budget to improve public toilets). £6,000 of this funding is already committed to the City Theatre project which begins in mid-August.

Councillors C Lattin and V Ashfield advised that they could not support this proposal, particularly in reference to the use of fake/ silk/ plastic florals to shop frontages. Councillor C Lattin felt that this would be inappropriate particularly given the need for more real planting and greenery in this part of the City.

Councillor V Ashfield felt that the lifespan of this type of material would be very short indeed and would look out of place in this historic street, particularly during the Winter.

Councillors A Doig and E Scott advised that they felt that funding should instead be directed to fencing off the waste bins in Fowler's Yard which is in a terrible condition. The Clerk and Councillor E Ashby highlighted the many difficulties with this arrangement and the fact that the landowner is a private landlord seeking to develop this site.

The Chair echoed the concerns of Councillors V Ashfield and C Lattin on this proposal.

Members **agreed** that they would be keen to carry out some works to improve this street, particularly in recognition of the concerns from local businesses. However, it was unanimously **agreed** not to pursue the proposed silk floral displays, set out in this report. Instead, Members unanimously **agreed** to delegate to the Clerk this fund and to work proactively with the BID on a suitable alternative scheme to improve Silver Street.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 27th June 2024 as follows:

The Chair began by wishing everyone attending this year's Durham Fringe a most enjoyable Festival. The Chair remarked that it is really wonderful to see this arts festival in our City once again. To think that this event started life as a kitchen table idea only a few years ago and has now grown to 90 shows across 8 venues in our City in such a short space of time is really amazing!

The Chair reported that the event has already sold over 6,000 tickets. A new development for this year has been "Fringe Week" - a range of offers and discounts for audiences, performers, volunteers and crew - with the aim of extending dwell time in the city, driving up spend and creating a sense of festival feel and buzz. This has got off to a great start this year, and has significant potential to grow in future years.

The Chair offered many thanks to Stephen and Suzanne Cronin, the Fringe Board and the 100+ volunteers this year who have made this event happen.

Equally, the Chair offered a very big thanks to the organisers of the Durham Brass Festival and Durham Miner's Gala in the City too and remarked that it was really wonderful to see these annual events return and to see so many families enjoying themselves throughout the events in the sunshine. The Chair remarked that these events really add to the atmosphere and vibrancy of our City. The Chair expressed the hope that the additional footfall generated by these events translates to more cash behind the tills at our many great businesses.

The Chair also advised that she enjoyed seeing the thousands of runners being cheered on by crowds lining the Durham City run last Thursday. The sense of camaraderie and positivity was amazing and the Chair expressed the hope that lots of money is raised for each of the charities represented at the race.

The Chair advised that she particularly welcomed the news in today's Advertiser that STACK are committing to improving their frontage. The Chair advised that she was aware that the BID had been liaising closely with the company and that our MP has also urged them to act on this as soon as possible. The current frontage is really detracting from the street scene and sense of place in our historic Market Place and Silver Street.

The Chair offered her congratulations to the Citrus Group on gaining planning consent for the new Prince Bishops Shopping Centre. The Chair took the opportunity to thank John Ashby, who spoke on behalf of the Parish Council and to Councillor David Freeman for his remarks too. The Chair remarked that her main takeaway from the Committee hearing was to see the Local Planning Authority throw out the absurd student numbers purported by the applicant in order to demonstrate a need for additional student accommodation. That said, the Chair expressed her serious disappointment to see the Committee approve the scheme with a fraction of the Section 106 monies for open space enhancement offered by the applicant. The Chair expressed that the agreed sum was an insult and that she felt she could not conclude otherwise that planners had sold the City short to the tune of over £500,000.

The Chair offered her thanks to Councillor David Freeman for his ongoing work to ensure enforcement of the Traffic Regulation Order in the Market Place and Elvet Bridge. The Chair advised that she understood that there has been further enforcement operations involving DCC and the Police. The Chair expressed her gratitude to the Clerk for arranging a photograph with Parish Councillors last month and expressed that this operation was a real eye-opener of the extent of this problem.

The Chair took the opportunity to wish Nick Malyan well in his future role as Chief Executive of Culture Sunderland after the surprise announcement that he will be leaving his role at Redhills. The Chair remarked that Nick has been a tremendous friend to the Parish Council and this is a tremendous loss to our City. The Chair advised that it has been a delight to work with Nick on so many projects over the years. The Chair wished his successor well in seeing through the completion of the redevelopment of the Miner's Hall.

On the matter of enforcement, the Chair remarked that she was thoroughly appalled to hear the news that 114 drivers were arrested during the Euros as part of a targeted drink-driving enforcement operation organised by our Police and Crime Commissioner. The Chair thanked Joy Allen for arranging this and expressed the hope that this serves as a deterrent to anyone getting behind the wheel after consuming alcohol.

The Chair thanked the Clerk, DCC Highways and Visit County Durham on their work to secure the Coach Friendly Status Accreditation for the City – now one of only 3 areas across the county to have achieved this accolade – the Chair expressed the hope that this sends a huge message nationwide to coach operators that the City is open and welcoming for their business. The Chair expressed that this is a real triumph for our visitor economy and we hope this bears fruit for years to come.

Finally, the Chair reminded Members that the Council does not sit during August and wished all Members and the Clerk a most enjoyable and relaxing holiday season. The Chair advised that the Clerk will be taking some much-needed holiday time over August – exact dates of which will be circulated in due course.

7. REPORT ON GRANT FUNDING IMPACT FROM 2023-24

The Clerk reminded Members that in June 2023 the Parish Council agreed to support local voluntary and community organisations in the parish with a grant award. All applications were considered in line with the Parish Council's agreed Grant Awards policy and all successful organisations were advised accordingly of the outcome of their applications.

The Clerk advised that, under the terms of the Council's Grant Awards policy, organisations have up until June 2024 to spend the funds as per their original application. The Clerk advised that he continues to monitor progress on each application and had brought this report to Council in order to allow Members to consider the impact this funding has had on partner organisations.

Members very much welcomed this report as a further example of the positive impact and work of the Parish Council, supporting organisations who help some of the most vulnerable residents, who help improve the public realm in the parish and who help to make the parish an exceptional place to live, visit and work.

It was noted that a number of organisations had not yet responded to the request for a report and therefore it was unanimously **agreed** that the Clerk should write

to each of these organisations once more reminding them of their responsibility and agreement to submit such a report.

8. COMMUNITY WATER FLUORIDATION EXPANSION CONSULTATION

The Clerk highlighted the ongoing consultation relating to the expansion of community water fluoridation in the North East of England.

The Clerk advised that this consultation seeks views on a proposal by the previous Government to request Northumbrian Water Limited, to enter into new fluoridation arrangements, and to vary existing agreements, in order to expand community water fluoridation schemes across several parts of the North East of England, including the City of Durham parish area.

The Clerk highlighted that the consultation material indicates that this is because of the significant and long-standing inequalities in the region and this formed part of the previous Government's plan to improve dental health.

In considering this proposal, Members acknowledged the Government's commitment to improving dental health and the wellbeing of communities. In particular, Members welcomed the Government's pledge to create 700,000 additional urgent dental appointments per year and recruit new dentists in underserved areas. It was agreed that this critical work is all the more urgent given the recent report by the Healthcare Watchdog which highlights the difficulties for patients accessing dentistry services across County Durham

The Clerk highlighted the recent correspondence from the "County Durham Against Fluoridation" group to Members and Members agreed that this is a hugely polarising issue. As such, the Members agreed that there is a need for a wider and more comprehensive public consultation on this issue.

Councillor R Ormerod objected to the proposal as he felt this translated to mass medication and this was seconded by Councillor C Lattin.

Councillor E Ashby highlighted that there is a legal obligation for the Government to monitor health impacts of water fluoridation schemes every 4 years, with the next monitoring review taking place in 2026. The health monitoring report for England 2022 looked at the prevalence and severity of dental caries in 3 to 5 year-old children and hospital admissions for removing teeth due to decay in children and young people.

As such, Councillor E Ashby proposed that the Parish Council responds to this consultation requesting that this proposal be delayed until after the 2026 monitoring review has been completed.

Councillor E Ashby further proposed that the Parish Council asks that the Government directs all resources associated with the expansion of this community fluoridation scheme to addressing the serious backlog in NHS dentistry appointments, expanding complementary alternative strategies aimed at reducing

tooth decay in England, including oral health promotion programmes and education as well as improving the availability of critical dentistry services in our community.

Both of these proposals from Councillor E Ashby were unanimously **agreed** by Members.

9. TO CONSIDER THE PROPOSED ADVERT FOR A SHORT-TERM CONSULTANCY CONTRACT

The Clerk reminded Members that, in agreeing its budget for financial year 2024/25 in January 2024, Members unanimously approved a fund of £15,000 towards assistance for the Clerk in supporting the functions and aims of the Parish Council.

Although originally envisaged to be administrative support, the Clerk reminded Members that previous efforts to recruit at this level have been unsuccessful and the Council is presently investigating technical/ automated solutions to support the Clerk's work with minute taking (as one example).

The Clerk advised that the Council has previously expressed a desire to focus on acquiring external funding for projects within the City of Durham parish area. As such, it is recommended that this fund be used to finance a number of one-off, time-limited pieces of work on a contract basis.

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council has successfully been able to deliver on a number of projects on a similar contractual basis with external consultants; including the investigation into HMOs across the City, retail support for City centre businesses, the production of an evidence-base for an Article 4 Direction in Mount Oswald and a report into the distinction between planning/ licensing hours in premises across the City.

At a recent meeting of the Council's Personnel Committee and provided that Members are in agreement about the use of this funding, the Clerk indicated that he felt that the Parish Council should focus on 3 particular areas for achieving external finance from this budget: a clean air project, heritage at risk and culture.

As part of a clean air project, the Clerk advised that the Environment Committee has recently discussed the proposal of revisiting the green roof bus shelters and has expressed a desire to look at delivering 5-6 such shelters in Gilesgate (Gilesgate bank), Lower Claypath and Elvet (Church Street). The total cost for such a project would likely range between £87,000 - £105,000.

The Clerk advised that it is hoped that this particular project could be delivered by a consultant within a budget of approximately £5,000 depending on their inclusive daily rate.

The Clerk advised that the delivery of such a project has been supported by the local Residents' Associations in these areas and would be a welcome and proactive step by the Parish Council in taking action on clean air in the city.

The Clerk highlighted The Personnel Committee met earlier this month and have agreed that the content of an advert, as provided in the report to Members this evening.

Councillor C Lattin advised that she very much welcomed this proposal and congratulated the Personnel Committee on its focus in relation to clean air.

Councillor R Ormerod also advised that he supported this initiative and expressed the hope that such a person might be available to carry out this work.

Members unanimously **agreed** to the use of this budget for a short-term consultancy project, as set out in the above report.

Members also unanimously **agreed** to the advert provided with this report and asked the Clerk to advertise this accordingly.

Members also unanimously **agreed** to delegate responsibility for appointment of an appropriate individual for this task to the Personnel Committee.

10. REPORT(S) FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

Report by Councillor J Ashby on the most recent meeting of Durham University's Student Housing Management Group.

Councillor J Ashby presented the following report to Council from the meeting of the University's student housing management group held on 25th June 2024:

- 1. The County Council's Housing Strategy has now been approved by Cabinet and recognises the particular nature of the housing market in and around Durham City and the need for affordable housing for students.*
- 2. The case for an Additional Licensing Scheme was to be the subject of a report to the County Council's Cabinet in June but this has not yet occurred. There was to be a meeting with officers of the County Council later today. I do not know what, if any, progress was achieved.*
- 3. The Durham Students Union has completed a survey of nearly 300 student tenants and recorded very many complaints, mainly about the state of the property and the responses of letting agents/landlords.*
- 4. Work is on-going for the Do-it-Online reporting system to be more user-friendly, and for a student housing issues on-line hub. By the end of 2024 the aim is to add issues about mould etc to be raised on-line for non-licensed HMOs, which of course comprise 75% of the HMOs in the city.*
- 5. The University presented finalised results of this year's intense analysis of student addresses. This analysis matches the University's records against the County Council's Class N Exemptions. A report will be made available soon. We can now be absolutely definite on the question of quantitative "need" that is required by County Durham Policy 16.2: there are more student beds than students, and the number of students is going to be stable from now on at*

around 21,500 so there is no case on quantitative grounds for additional student beds.

End of report

There being no further business, the Chair thanked Members for their attendance and contributions and closed the meeting.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. A. Mah', with a stylized, cursive script.

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council
(25th September 2024)**